Erasmus+

2015/2327(INI) - 18/01/2017 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Culture and Education adopted the own-initiative report by Milan ZVER (EPP, SI) on the implementation of Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing ‘Erasmus+’: the Union programme for education, training, youth and sport and repealing Decisions No 1719/2006/EC, No 1720/2006/EC and No 1298/2008/EC.

Members recalled that Erasmus+ is one of the most successful Union programmes and the **major tool to support activities in the fields of education, training, youth and sport** giving the opportunity to more than four million Europeans to study, train and volunteer in another country over the period 2014-2020.

They noted that the programme's high educational, societal, political and economic relevance is reflected in the budget increase of 40 % for the programme period, and in the commitment rate of the budget provided for, which has reached nearly 100 % because of a high number of applications.

Members recalled that at a time of particular crisis with regard to the fundamental values of the EU, the Erasmus+ instrument can provide a fundamental opportunity to promote integration, understanding and solidarity among young people.

Members made the following finding and recommendations:

Slow first phase of the programme: Members recognised that, according to reports from stakeholders at all levels, while the **first two and a half years of programme implementation were difficult and challenging**. Improvements have been made in the meantime, however, having fewer bureaucratic obstacles would lead to a wider and more accessible programme. Therefore, Members called for further efforts to be made to reduce bureaucracy across the project cycle and to set the costs appropriately and in relation to the budget or type of project.

Visibility of the programme: Members underlined that although the overall programme is more visible than its predecessor, the **different sectorial programmes still lack visibility**. They emphasised that sector-specific formats such as Grundtvig Workshops and national youth initiatives open to informal groups should be reintroduced, and transnational youth initiatives should be more easily accessible. They stressed that the **youth chapter of the programme is the one most affected by European citizens’ increasing interest in Erasmus+.** They noted that, at present, 36 % of all Erasmus+ submissions are in the field of youth, with a **60 % increase in submissions between 2014 and 2016**.

Brands: Members considered that the long-standing brand names (Comenius, Erasmus, Erasmus Mundus, Leonardo da Vinci, Grundtvig and Youth in Action) and their logos to be important tools in promoting the variety of the programme. They noted that the name of "Erasmus+" is becoming the best known, especially for newcomers. They emphasised that the programme should defend its new name ‘Erasmus+’ and for the name "Erasmus+" to be added to the individual programmes (so they will be "Erasmus+ Comenius", "Erasmus+ Mundus", "Erasmus+ Leonardo da Vinci", "Erasmus+ Grundtvig" and "Erasmus+ Youth In Action").

School dimension of the programme: Members called on the Commission to strengthen the **school education dimension of the programme**, allowing for more mobility of pupils, simplification of funding and administrative procedures for schools and for non-formal education providers, thereby taking advantage of the general intention of Erasmus+ to foster cross-sectoral cooperation, and with a view to encouraging non-formal education providers to become involved with partnerships with schools.

They recommended that subsidy amounts in the school cooperation sector be reduced to the benefit of the number of subsidised projects, in order to subsidise school exchanges directly and thus make more personal encounters between people of different cultures and languages possible.

Budget: Members recalled that despite the programme's significant overall budget increase, only a limited increase for the first half of the programme period has been provided for in the MFF, which has led, unfortunately, to the rejection of many high-quality projects. They welcomed the increase in **funds available for the Erasmus+ programme for the year 2017 by almost EUR 300 million compared to 2016**.

Members not only call for the current budget level to be secured for the next programme generation under the new MFF, but considered a further budget increase that ensures a level of annual funding for the next programme generation of at least the same level as the last year of implementation of the current framework to be an absolutely essential precondition for the continued success of the programme. They pointed out that **greater flexibility in mobility grants and administrative costs in favour of longer stays abroad** should be made possible for the national agencies.

Moreover, they stressed that grants to support the mobility of individuals within the Erasmus+ programme should be **exempted from taxation and social levies**.

Small-sized organisations: Members expressed regret that, owing to the high administrative burden, **Erasmus+ funding can be unattainable for smaller organisations**. They called on the Commission to significantly simplify the application procedure, and to transform the programme guide and make it more user-oriented.

They also regretted that organisations representing amateur sportspeople, and disabled sportspeople in particular, at local level are highly underrepresented as project participants in the implementation of grassroots sports projects. They welcomed the introduction of Small Collaborative Partnerships with reduced administrative requirements and noted that the practice should be extended to other sectors of the Erasmus+ project funding, especially for volunteer organisations.

The Commission is called upon to take relevant steps to make volunteering eligible as a source of own contributions to the project budget, as this facilitates the participation of smaller organisations, especially in sport.

Recognition of international qualifications: Members stressed that although progress has been made in recognising study periods, credits, competences and skills through non-formal and informal learning gained abroad, these challenges remain. According to Members, the **recognition of international qualifications is essential to mobility** and forms the foundation for further cooperation in the European Higher Education Area.

Cross-sectoral cooperation: Members asked the Commission to fully exploit the lifelong learning dimension of the programme by fostering and encouraging cross-sectoral cooperation under Erasmus+, which is much higher than under the predecessor programmes, and to evaluate cross-sectoral cooperation in the programme's midterm evaluation presented at the end of 2017. They called for **educational mobility to become part of any higher or vocational education programmes** in order to improve the quality of higher education and the VET system, to help individuals upgrade their professional skills, competences and career development, as well as to strengthen awareness of competences gained during mobility in all targeted sectors.

Administrative simplification: Members called on the Commission and the Member States to increase efforts to **simplify procedures and reduce the high administrative burden for students, institutions**

and for host companies involved in Erasmus+ projects. They called on the Commission and the national agencies to standardise the access criteria with a view to ensuring access for the highest number of applicants possible and to encourage the national agencies to make the available budgets per key action and per sector easily accessible following each application round in order to allow applicants to strategically plan their future actions. The Commission and the Member States are also called on to ensure that large institutions are not favoured over their smaller less well-established counterparts, in terms of programme applicants.

While welcoming the simplification introduced by the use of **lump-sum and flat-rate funding**, Members encouraged the Commission to look for ways to further improve the complicated administrative procedure for the applicants in different sectors of the programme.

Harmonisation: lastly, Members suggested that the priority should be to refrain from further harmonisation and major changes in the structure of the programme, and instead to safeguard and consolidate achievements and make incremental improvements where necessary. They called on the Commission in this respect to involve relevant stakeholders in the work on the next funding programming period, and in the introduction of possible improvements, in order to ensure the programme's further success and added value.